

Some call it spring; others just call it golf season.

By Sally Campbell Grout

People who really love golf need nothing more than a few rays of sun and a temperature above two digits to send them to the driving range. But a full day of nine- or 18-hole fun requires weather that's a little more cooperative. Fortunately, those days are finally here, and inviting Indiana courses await folks ready to walk (or ride) the fairways.

In Northern Indiana:

It's the land of rolling sand dunes, busy casinos, quiet Amish communities, and long, leisurely fairways on courses such as these:

Swan Lake Golf Club/Golf Academy

There's a lesson every athlete learns early: sports are more fun when you're good at them. At Swan Lake Resort in Plymouth (800-582-7539), the Golf Academy's experienced instructors help you refine your skills, so you'll go home with more stories about the shots you actually made than about the shots you almost made. You'll find a low student to instructor ratio; a personal video golf analysis; and video and print support materials. Ready to just play? Hit the nine-hole course, two 18-hole courses, or the busy person's dream: a 5-hole Executive course.

Blackthorne Golf Course

Whether you're returning to the course as a "regular," or playing there for the first time, you're sure to enjoy your experience at Blackthorne Golf Course in South Bend (574-232-4653). At this peaceful, elegant course which rolls along 7,100 yards, the staff is committed to giving every guest resort-style treatment. If you're looking to improve your game, lessons are available from the "Swingfixers" at Blackthorne Golf Club Academy. These pros have been well trained and are well prepared to pass those lessons on to you.

In Eastern Indiana:

Quite a few famous people hail from this part of the state. So who knows? If you conquer these courses, along with others in the area, you may become of golfer of some renown.

Cobblestone Golf Course

Golf outings are great ways to unite coworkers, raise money for a charitable cause, or simply reconnect with old friends. Cobblestone Golf Course in Kendallville (260-349-1550) is ready to accommodate groups of just about any size, from a handful to a big bunch. Banquet facilities are available to large groups; smaller groups can enjoy snacks and meals in the clubhouse. Arrive early to try out the practice facility, driving range,

and putting green—and to visit the fully stocked pro shop featuring Titleist, Callaway, and Taylor Made equipment along with several clothing lines.

Noble Hawk Golf Links

Kendallville offers another opportunity to test your talents: Noble Hawk Golf Links (260-349-0900). Nicknamed “The Hawk,” the course combines some holes that are clearly inspired by the traditional Scottish Links style, others that are more “Floridian,” with plenty of water all around, and others that feature dramatic contours and trees on all sides.

Walnut Creek Golf Courses

Upland’s Walnut Creek Golf Courses (800-998-7651) incorporate hills, woods and water on 36 picturesque holes. Walnut Creek, the original 18 holes, opened in 1970 and has been challenging golfers ever since. The slightly shorter Club Run was added in 1998, and provides more opportunities to perfect your game. The clubhouse, ironically, has been around quite a bit longer. The recently restored 1840’s Greek Revival structure, now featuring a gift shop, two museum rooms, and three separate dining rooms, was once a stop on the Underground Railroad.

In Central Indiana:

In and around the bustling capital city, you’ll find quiet retreats where the only traffic is the occasional golf cart.

Brickyard Crossing Golf Course

It’s ironic; at the Brickyard Crossing Golf Course in Indianapolis (317-484-6572) the roaring engines of motor sports inspire the hushed tones of golf. And they come together perfectly. Designed by renowned course architect Pete Dye, this 18-hole challenger features several holes on the infield of the track, plenty of water hazards, and views of both the Indianapolis skyline and the racetrack grandstands.

Heartland Crossing Golf Links

More colorful, picturesque views await golfers at Heartland Crossing Golf Links in Camby (317-630-1785). Bent grass tees, fairways, and greens combine with a Kentucky Bluegrass rough, colorful wildflowers, sparkling blue water and white sand bunkers.

In Western Indiana:

The western part of the state may be known for its college towns and covered bridges, but its golf courses are making quite a name for themselves, too. Here are just a couple of are favorites:

Lafayette Municipal Golf Course

Keep your head down. The Lafayette Municipal Golf Course (765-476-4588) features tough approach shots at every hole. With generous fairways and raised, undulating greens, the 18-hole course plays from 5241 to 7081 yards. Recent improvements, such as cart paths, irrigation, and ongoing bunker work, make a day at this course more pleasant (or frustrating, depending on how your game goes) than ever.

Birck Boilermaker Golf Complex

At the Birck Boilermaker Complex in West Lafayette (765-494-3139), you'll find two 18-hole championship courses—both challenging, but each unique. The Ackerman Hills course, with its hilly, forested terrain and narrow fairways, is the more traditional, manicured course. The Kampen Course is a must for nature lovers. Tuck your binoculars into your golf bag and get ready to see incredible flora and fauna. With nearly 7,000 trees, six ponds and 12,000 wetland plants, the course fulfills architect Pete Dye's dream of a course that serves as a living laboratory for environmental researchers and students.

In South Central Indiana:

Natural wonders abound here. But you'll also find new and exiting casinos and the golf courses that go with them.

The Links at Grand Victoria Casino

It's not exactly a water hazard, but the rolling Ohio River does provide a beautiful backdrop for the The Links at the Grand Victoria Casino and Resort (812-438-5148) in Rising Sun. The 6,400-yard Scottish Links-style course offers panoramic views of the Ohio River Valley. Designed by Tim Liddy, the par 71, 18-hole course includes sweeping bunkers, lakes, and gently rolling bent grass fairways. Still have some energy left? The casino offers slot machines, table games, restaurants and entertainment.

Belterra Casino Resort

Most courses brag about their greens. The course at Belterra Casino Resort (800-594-5833) in Belterra can boast about its vibrant color scheme. Large areas of colorful wildflowers, along with newly created lakes and more than 2,200 trees, enhance this 7,000 yard course. Designed by master golf architect Tom Fazio, this 18-hole course showcases naturally contoured elevation differences of up to 65 feet, which were created to accentuate the incredible views of the Ohio River and Log Lick Creek. Once you've tested your skills on the course, you're welcome to test your luck in the casino. Or, simply relax in one of five restaurants, a comfy room, and a spa.

In Southern Indiana:

The story of Hoosier history starts here, and so do some great relaxing golf weekends. Here are a couple of places to start:

French Lick Springs Resort

Looking for an ideal “only-one-of-us-plays-golf” getaway? French Lick Springs Resort and Spa (800-457-4042) just may be the perfect destination. This historic resort, made famous by the mineral waters that bubbled from local springs, offers complete spa services, tennis, horseback riding, dining and entertainment. The golf course was commissioned in 1920 and designed by world-renowned architect Donald Ross. Players today still find a challenging links-type course with deep green-side bunkers and severely undulating greens.

Sultan’s Run Golf Club

On the grounds of what’s now Sultan’s Run Golf Club in Jasper (888-684-3287), a horse named Supreme Sultan once lived. Supreme Sultan is known for having sired a record number of World Champion American Saddlebred horses. Today, the names of those champions are found on engraved stones at each tee box. However, Sultan’s Run is not simply about the past; it’s earned quite a reputation in the present. In 1996, designer Tim Liddy reworked the existing course in an extensive redesign project. The result: a course that Golf Digest’s “Places to Play Guide” described as “scenic, challenging, and worth the trip to Jasper.” The magazine also said “the waterfall behind the 18th hole takes your breath away.”

Ready to start planning your weekend?

There are hundreds of golf courses ready to be conquered throughout the state. To request a free copy of the Indiana Golf and Travel Guide, visit enjoyindiana.com and click on Travel Brochures. While you’re on line, you’ll find dozens of other ideas for filling your weekend—and your warm weather months—with fun.